



March 14th @ 7pm March • 15-17th @ 10am & 7pm
 Christ In You Holiness Church • 4703 Sunnyvale, Dallas, TX 75216
 www.ChristInYouHoliness.org • (469) 658-2601

Poor vs. poorer

Plans for an expanded Roseland Homes spark a protest in a working-class neighborhood near Cityplace

By Felicia Mccarthy

published: February 24, 2000

Tim Lott stood before a seething crowd of East Dallas homeowners and residents of the Roseland Homes public housing project, trying to show them the big picture. In one hand he held a diagram of the Dallas Housing Authority's plan for a new and improved Roseland. In the other he held a pointer. Lott, the housing authority's vice president of development and planning, cheerfully explained that the new project would be equipped with amenities comparable to those of private residential developments. After finishing his spiel, Lott looked up at the crowd and smiled. No one was smiling back.

Mark Graham



Roseland Homes-area resident Carl Smith says his neighborhood needs affordable — not public — housing.

Neighborhood residents who gathered February 10 for a meeting at the Roseland Homes Community Center held signs reading "Progress Not Projects" and "A Shady Deal." They had come to protest plans to build 212 apartments in their neighborhood and to let the housing authority know they were angry about how the agency had informed them about the redevelopment.

The housing authority plans to raze all but three of the 62 buildings at the substandard 58-year-old project northeast of downtown and replace them with a mix of affordable private homes and public housing. The new development will include 259 public-housing units, 40 low-cost houses, 100 apartments

for low-income elderly residents, and 87 market-rate apartments at the present site on Washington Avenue. Another 212 apartments will be erected on vacant lots on Carroll, Munger, Lafayette, and Kirby streets.

It's the latter part of the plan that has particularly angered residents who live in the neighborhood near Cityplace. Like their fellow homeowners in affluent North Dallas who have waged a long and costly court battle to keep public housing out of their neighborhoods, the residents near Roseland say they don't want the project spreading into their community.

Ironically, unlike in North Dallas, many of the housing authority's opponents this time are not much better off financially than the people who will live in the new Roseland. That makes the latest battle a case of poor vs. poorer in a neighborhood caught between the housing authority's redevelopment plans and a wave of gentrification that is eliminating much of the low-income housing in East Dallas.

According to the 1990 census, the median household income in the Roseland neighborhood was \$8,875. Median income in Roseland Homes was \$4,999. In the surrounding neighborhoods, median incomes ranged from \$47,344 in the Bryan Place Homes across Ross Avenue to \$5,665 for an area of single-family homes northeast of Washington Avenue.

But the neighborhood is rapidly changing. Donald Walker, an agent at the city's census office, says

median incomes in this year's census results will be higher than 1990's. "Just look at all of the new apartment complexes in the area with rents averaging \$1,000 a month," Walker says.

Michelle Raglon, director of public relations for the Dallas Housing Authority, says the agency is simply trying to make sure that the neighborhood's low-income residents will still have a place -- a nicer place -- to live.

To some of the people in the working-class communities around Roseland who live at the lower end of the economic scale, the new project will be a bit too nice.

"They're talking about some of these apartments are luxury apartments," says Carl Smith, who has lived near Roseland for 30 years. "That's kind of a slap in the face that the taxpayers are going to have to pay taxes for them to live in luxury. They're going to make the people living in public housing better off than their neighbors."

Still others near Roseland fear that the project's expansion will lower their property values and quality of life.

The redevelopment is a \$75 million public-private venture financed in part with a \$35 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The other \$40 million will come from low-income tax credits, private loans and bonds, and other affordable housing program funds. The housing authority plans to do construction in eight phases with work wrapping up by 2003.

Many residents living nearby complain that they were not properly informed about the plans for redevelopment. In early January the housing authority sent a certified letter revealing project details to surrounding residents. But the letter was written in English, and the neighborhood's residents are mostly Spanish-speaking immigrants as well as Cambodians, Thais, and Vietnamese. Because the local post office is closed for renovations, residents had to travel across town to pick up the letters. Speakers at the February 10 meeting made it clear that many did not have the time at the end of their workdays to pick up certified mail.

Many of the homeowners might have missed the meeting altogether had it not been for Smith, who translated the agency's letter into Spanish and distributed 300 fliers in the area.

Homeowners also fear that expanding public housing across Haskell Avenue will add to overcrowding at neighborhood schools and will halt private development that has boomed in the area recently.

Among the opponents is Dallas school trustee Kathleen Leos, who has filed a formal protest with the housing authority on behalf of parents at the Cesar Chavez and John F. Kennedy learning centers, J.W. Ray elementary, and North Dallas High School.

"Most [parents] are renters and received no notification whatsoever," says Leos, who rents a home in the neighborhood.

Developer J.D. McCaslin spoke out in favor of the redevelopment project and told those at the meeting that his company had already put \$30 million in private funds into an apartment complex to the north of Roseland.

"I looked at the plans, and I'm very encouraged by what is going on here," McCaslin says.

But Carl Smith and other neighborhood residents say that what the area needs is affordable single-family homes, not more public housing, and that the homes need to be available to people who already live in the neighborhood.

Smith says they were surprised by the housing authority's plans to expand Roseland beyond its

present borders -- a fact many in the community say they were unaware of until January. The housing authority's Raglon points out that there have been numerous articles about the project published in *The Dallas Morning News* since 1997. Raglon also says the agency has had several meetings with neighborhood representatives during the planning process.

According to the Dallas Central Appraisal District, the housing authority's nonprofit arm began acquiring deeds for some land outside Roseland last July. Some neighborhood residents are angry, because they believe the housing authority is simply going through the motions for a plan that is already a done deal.

That's what seems to have angered Smith and neighborhood activists such as Joe May the most.

"I'm not opposed to public housing per se," May says. "I'm opposed to the way they approached the issue. They're just trying to ram it through." May says he learned about the issue when he ran into one of Councilman John Loza's aides at City Hall. "Nobody's ever invited me to sit down and told me, 'We're going to build this and that.'"

Smith says he and his neighbors will sue if the housing authority continues with the expansion.

"We get sued every time we do something," says Raglon, who adds that she can't understand why the poor are fighting to keep the poor from moving into better housing. "This is something that we haven't dealt with before," she says.

Raglon points out that at the rate at which luxury apartments are going up around Cityplace, low-income families are getting squeezed out of their own neighborhood. "If we weren't building there, affordable housing would be knocked out of that area," she says.

Raglon says that all the housing authority is trying to do is honor its commitment to Roseland residents who have a right to remain in the neighborhood they've lived in for years.

